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Letter to the Editor

E. Daniel Hirleman

*Dean, School of Engineering
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Tribute to John Grandin

I am pleased to join in providing some words of tribute to a great academic who was among the first to see globalization as a force that would transform engineering education. But not only was John Grandin ahead of his time in anticipating the changes, he also had the vision and tenacity to do something about it. He built the International Engineering Program, one that remains a model to this day, long before global programs became "popular".

John innately understands the importance of language and culture for their own sake. But beyond that, he also was among the first to appreciate their consequence in the broader context of being a global engineer and a global citizen. Engineers define and solve problems that improve the quality of life for people, but what constitutes an improved "quality of life" depends on their culture and associated values. So a global engineer needs to be able to get out of their own culture and see things from a different perspective. Global engineers must be good and respectful listeners, and proficiency in the second language is an important component of that. It is not easy to convince engineering students to take on language in addition to their technical studies, but John and his colleagues succeeded in doing, at scale. I have a deep appreciation of how difficult that is based on experience, and I remain awed by what John and his team accomplished in a sustained way over so many years.

Success in the endeavor John and his team at the University of Rhode Island undertook requires several other factors. First, a dedicated cross-disciplinary team from URI was required, which requires leadership. John, being a very gracious man, is quick to recognize his team and their crucial contributions. But at the same time one person does have to step out and take the risk, and bring everyone else on board on the basis of shared values. And that's what happened at URI.

Secondly, international university and private sector partners are key. And developing and sustaining those relationships takes an incredible amount of time. John had the knack for identifying like-minded people, and then building those win-win partnerships in a way that provided extraordinary opportunities to the students of the IEP. And finally, it's necessary to build administrative support for a plan as bold as what John and his team delivered. To have the dedicated building, make the IEP a centerpiece of the URI recruitment effort, and sustain the program means that John was very effective working with administrators. No easy task, but obviously one handled effectively and with grace by John Grandin.

So kudos John, for vision and execution, and a job very well done. You have every right to proud and gratified at the success of the IEP, but also of your profound influence on me and many others as we in many ways followed in your footsteps.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dan Hirleman". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

E. Daniel Hirleman